

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for facilitating the creation of personalized products, for use in a system where a user on a user computer can access at least one host merchant computer via a communication network, the host merchant computer including a web server in communication with a products database containing information on products available for personalization and further containing manufacturing capabilities for the products, the method comprising:

providing to the user via said communication network at least one web page providing an assortment of product selections available in said products database;

receiving a message from the user via said communication network indicating a selection of a product from said assortment;

retrieving a set of manufacturing capabilities for said selected product from the products database;

providing to the user via said communication network a design interface, said design interface comprising at least one web page including at least one design tool that allows the user to select product configuration options and to create individualized enhancements, and wherein said design tool is conformed to only allow configuration options and enhancements which satisfy said manufacturing capabilities; and

receiving from the user via said design interface a set of product configuration options and a set of individualized enhancements for said selected product.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said individualized enhancements include a pictorial image incorporated onto said selected product with an image position determined by the user.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein said individualized enhancements include a text message incorporated onto said selected product with a text position determined by the user.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said design interface presents to the user a default set of product configuration options and a default set of enhancements.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;

5 and

presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of digital image selections retrieved from at least one digital image database in communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

10 6. The method of claim 5, further comprising:

receiving from said user via said communication network a selected image from said assortment of digital image selections; and

incorporating said selected image into said set of individualized enhancements using said design tool.

15 7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;

and

presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of text message selections retrieved from at least one text message database in communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

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8. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

receiving from said user via said communication network a selected text message from said assortment of text message selections; and

25 incorporating said selected text message into said set of individualized enhancements using said design tool.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving from the user via said communication network a request to save a set of product configurations and a set of individualized enhancements; and

storing said set of product configuration selections and said set of individualized enhancements in a location accessible to that user via said communication network.

10. The method for claim 1, further comprising

5 converting said set of product configuration options and said set of individualized enhancements into at least one file having a format compatible with the needs of a vendor of said selected product; and

providing said file to said vendor of said selected product.

11. A method for facilitating the creation of personalized products, for use in a
10 system where a user on a user computer can access at least one host merchant computer via a communication network, the method comprising:

providing an assortment of product selections to the user via said communication network;

15 receiving a message from the user via said communication network indicating a selection of a product from said assortment;

retrieving a set of manufacturing capabilities for said selected product; and

20 providing to the user via said communication network a design interface, said design interface comprising at least one design tool that allows the user to select product configuration options and to create individualized enhancements, and wherein said design tool is adapted so that the user may only select configuration options and create enhancements which comply with said manufacturing capabilities.

25 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising receiving from the user via said design interface a set of product configuration options and a set of individualized enhancements for said selected product.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein said individualized enhancements include a pictorial image incorporated onto said selected product with an image size, image position, and image orientation determined by the user.

30 14. The method of claim 11, wherein said individualized enhancements include a text message incorporated onto said selected product with a font, text color, text size, text position, and text orientation determined by the user.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein said design interface presents to the user a default set of product configuration options and a default set of enhancements.

16. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;

and

presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of digital image selections retrieved from at least one digital image database in communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising:

receiving from said user via said communication network a selected image from said assortment of digital image selections; and

incorporating said selected image into said set of individualized enhancements using said design tool.

18. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;

and

presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of text message selections retrieved from at least one text message database in communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:

receiving from said user via said communication network a selected text message from said assortment of text message selections; and

incorporating said selected text message into said set of individualized enhancements using said design tool.

20. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

receiving from the user via said communication network a request to save a set of product configurations and a set of individualized enhancements; and

storing said set of product configuration selections and said set of individualized enhancements in a location accessible to that user via said communication network.

21. The method of claim 12, further comprising

5 converting said set of product configuration options and said set of individualized enhancements into at least one file having a format compatible with the needs of a vendor of said selected product; and

providing said file to said vendor of said selected product.

22. A method for facilitating the creation of personalized products,
10 comprising:

a' receiving from a user via a communication network a first set of design components created for a first product, said first set of design components corresponding to product configuration options and individualized enhancements;

15 receiving from the user via said communication network an identifier for a second product selected for personalization;

retrieving a set of manufacturing capabilities for said second product;

generating a second set of design components derived from said first set of design components, wherein each component of said second set of design components complies with said set of manufacturing capabilities;

20 providing to the user a design interface comprising at least one design tool enabling the user to modify said design components, wherein said design interface is adapted so that the user may only create design components which comply with said set of manufacturing capabilities; and

25 receiving from the user via said design interface a set of product configuration options and a set of individualized enhancements for said selected product.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein receiving an identifier for a second product comprises:

30 providing to a user via said communication network an assortment of product selections available for personalization; and

receiving from the user via said communication network an identifier for a second product selected from said assortment.

24. The method of claim 22, further comprising:

receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;
and

presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of image selections retrieved from at least one image database in communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

25. The method of claim 22, further comprising:

receiving from the user a search query; and
presenting to the user an assortment of text message selections retrieved from at least one text message database in communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

26. The method of claim 22, further comprising:

receiving from the user via said communication network a request to save a set of design components; and
storing said set of design components in a location accessible to that user for later use by that user.

27. A method for facilitating the creation of personalized products, for use in a system where a user on a user computer can access at least one host merchant computer via a communication network, the method comprising:

providing to the user via said communication network a design interface, said design interface comprising at least one design tool that allows the user to select product configuration options and to create individualized enhancements, said configuration options and individualized enhancements comprising design components;

receiving a first set of design components corresponding to a first set of individualized enhancements from the user via said design interface before a product to be personalized has been identified;

receiving an identifier for a product selected for personalization from the user via said communication network;

retrieving a set of manufacturing capabilities for said selected product;
generating a second set of design components derived from said first set of
design components, wherein each component of said second set of design
components complies with said set of manufacturing capabilities;

5 loading said second set of design components into said design interface;
and

adapting said design interface so that the user may only select product
configuration options and create individualized enhancements satisfying said set
of manufacturing capabilities.

10 28. The method of claim 27, wherein receiving an identifier for a product
comprises:

providing to a user via said communication network an assortment of
product selections available for personalization; and

15 receiving from the user via said communication network an identifier for a
second product selected from said assortment.

29. The method of claim 27, further comprising receiving individualized
enhancements and selections of product configuration options from the user via said
design interface.

30. The method of claim 27, further comprising:

20 receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;
and

presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of
image selections retrieved from at least one image database in communication
with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said search query.

25 31. The method of claim 27, further comprising:

receiving a search query from the user via said communication network;
and

30 presenting to the user via said communication network an assortment of
text message selections retrieved from at least one text message database in
communication with said design interface, wherein said assortment satisfies said
search query.

32. The method of claim 27, further comprising:
receiving from the user via said communication network a request to save
a set of design components; and
storing said set of design components in a location accessible to that user
via said communication network for later use by that customer.

33. A method for designing a personalized product, for use in a system where
a user on a user computer can access at least one host merchant computer via a
communication network, the host merchant computer including a web server in
communication with a products database containing information on products available for
personalization and further containing manufacturing capabilities for the products, the
method comprising:

receiving from the host merchant via said communication network at least
one web page providing an assortment of product selections available for
personalization;

selecting a product from said assortment using a web-based selection tool;
receiving a design interface from a host merchant via said communication
network, said design interface comprising at least one web page including at least
one design tool that allows the user to select product configuration options and to
create individualized enhancements, and wherein said design tool is conformed to
only allow configuration options and enhancements which satisfy said
manufacturing capabilities; and

creating at least one individualized enhancement for said selected product
using said design interface.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein said design interface initially presents a
set of default design components associated with said selected product

35. The method of claim 33, wherein said individualized enhancement
includes a pictorial image incorporated onto said selected product with an image position
determined by the user.

36. The method of claim 33, wherein said individualized enhancement
includes a text message incorporated onto said selected product with a text position
determined by the user.

37. A system to allow a user to design personalized products, the system accessible to a user on a user computer via a communication network, the system comprising:

a server in communication with said communication network;

5 a products database in communication with said server, said products database comprising information on an assortment of product selections available for personalization, and further comprising manufacturing capabilities for said product selections;

10 a personalized product module in communication with said products database, said personalized product module capable of presenting an assortment of product selections to the user, and said personalized product module further capable of receiving an identifier of a selected product from the user;

15 a set of design tools in communication with said personalized product module that allow the user to select product configuration options and create individualized enhancements, wherein said set of design tools is adaptable to only accept product configuration selections and individualized enhancements which comply with a set of manufacturing capabilities associated with said selected product; and

20 a design buffer in communication with said set of design tools, said design buffer capable of containing product configuration options and individualized enhancements generated by the user via said set of design tools during a current design session.

38. The system of claim 37, further comprising a product browse tool in communication with said products database, wherein said product browse tool enables a user to browse said assortment of product selections of said products database.

39. The system of claim 37, further comprising a product search tool in communication with said products database, wherein said product search tool enables a user to search said assortment of product selections of said products database for products associated with a search query.

40. The system of claim 37, further comprising an image browse tool in communication with said image databases, wherein said image browse tool enables a user to browse said assortment of digital image selections of said image databases.

41. The system of claim 37, further comprising an image search tool in communication with said image databases, wherein said image search tool enables a user to search said assortment of digital image selections of said image databases for images associated with a search query.

42. The system of claim 37, further comprising:

a message database in communication with said set of design tools, said message database comprising an assortment of text message selections; and

a message browse tool in communication with said message database, wherein said message browse tool enables a user to browse said assortment of text message selections of said message database.

43. The system of claim 42, further comprising a message search tool in communication with said message database, wherein said message search tool enables a user to search said assortment of text message selections of said message database for text messages associated with a search query.

44. The system of claim 37, further comprising:

a personal database in communication with said set of design tools, said personal database being accessible only by a particular customer;

a save tool in communication with said personal database, said save tool configured so as to allow the particular user to save design information from said design database into said personal database; and

an upload tool in communication with said personal database, said upload tool configured so as to allow the particular user to upload design information from said personal database into said design database.

45. The system of claim 37, further comprising:

a template database in communication with said set of design tools, said template database comprising default sets of design components for each product of said product database; and

a template module in communication with said template database that generates a default set of design components for a particular product selected by the user for presentation to the user at the beginning of the design process.

46. A system to allow a user to design personalized products, the system
5 accessible to a user on a user computer via a communication network, the system comprising:

a products database comprising information on an assortment of product selections available for personalization, and further comprising manufacturing capabilities for said product selections;

10 a first module in communication with said products database, said first module capable of receiving an identifier of a selected product from a user; and

a second module in communication with said first module, said second module comprising at least one design tool that allow the user to select product configuration options and create individualized enhancements, wherein said
15 design tool is adaptable to only accept product configuration selections and individualized enhancements which comply with a set of manufacturing capabilities associated with said selected product.

47. The system of claim 46, further comprising a product browse tool in communication with said products database, wherein said product browse tool enables a
20 user to browse said assortment of product selections of said products database.

48. The system of claim 46, further comprising a product search tool in communication with said products database, wherein said products search tool enables a user to search said assortment of product selections for products associated with a search query.

25 49. The system of claim 46, further comprising at least one image database in communication with said second module, said image databases comprising an assortment of digital image selections.

50. The system of claim 46, further comprising an image browse tool in communication with said image databases, wherein said image browse tool enables a user
30 to browse said assortment of digital image selections of said image databases.

51. The system of claim 46, further comprising an image search tool in communication with said image databases, wherein said image search tool enables a user to search said assortment of digital image selections for images associated with a search query.

5 52. The system of claim 46, further comprising:
a message database comprising an assortment of text message selections;
and
a message browse tool in communication with said message database,
wherein said message browse tool enables a user to browse said assortment of text
10 message selections of said message database.

53. The system of claim 46, further comprising a message search tool in communication with said message database, wherein said message search tool enables a user to search said assortment of text message selections of said message database for text messages associated with a search query.

15 54. The system of claim 46, further comprising:
a personal database accessible only by a particular customer;
a save tool in communication with said personal database, said save tool configured so as to allow the particular user to save design information from said design database into said personal database; and
20 an upload tool in communication with said personal database, said upload tool configured so as to allow the particular user to upload design information from said personal database into said design database.

55. The system of claim 46, further comprising:
a template database comprising default sets of design components for each
25 product of said product database; and
a template module in communication with said template database that generates a default set of design components for a particular product selected by the user, for presentation to the user at the beginning of the design process.